



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for February 25, 2007
Released on Wednesday, February 21, 2007**

“Jesus Is the True Vine”

Devotional Reading: Psalm 1.

Background Scripture: John 15:1–17.

Printed Text: John 15:1–17.

John 15:1–17

- 1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.
- 2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.
- 3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.
- 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.
- 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.
- 6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.
- 7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.
- 8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.
- 9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.
- 10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.
- 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.
- 12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.
- 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
- 14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.
- 15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.
- 16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.
- 17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Identify what Jesus meant by *vine*, *branches*, and *fruit*.
2. Explain why we must remain connected, and maintain an intimate and meaningful relationship with Christ in order to bear fruit.
3. Correct one situation where he or she has failed to stay connected to the vine.

INTRODUCTION

The time for Jesus' crucifixion was rapidly drawing near. He had just celebrated the Passover with His disciples in the upper room (John 13:1). Judas had been identified as the traitor of the Lord and had left the group. After the instructions in chapter 14, Jesus said, "Arise, let us go hence" (v. 31), indicating that it was time to leave. He had just told them that the ruler of the world (referring to Satan), whom He had nothing to do with, was about to show up, and He would not be able to speak with them much longer (v. 30).

If Jesus was going to leave, how could the disciples be certain they would stay true to Him in the future, when He was no longer there to give immediate guidance? The remainder of this discourse seems to address this concern in great detail. He included reassurance that the Holy Spirit was going to help them.

Whether we like it or not, there are many things a person can't do alone. You can't run a relay race alone; you can't hold a conference alone; you can't do a group presentation alone; you can't play catch alone. As much as it may hurt our pride, there are some things that we can only do with the help and support of other people.

In our passage today Jesus adds something else to the list of things that we can't do ourselves: Jesus insists that we can't please God alone. This is the case because we draw our strength for service from our connection to Christ. God also commands us to love other people. We can't love others as long as we are focused on "going it alone."

Connected to Jesus (John 15:1–11)

1. Who was Jesus referring to when He spoke of the vine, and the husbandman (v. 1)?

Jewish readers would likely detect an allusion here to Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard. In Isaiah 5:1–7 the prophet compares Israel to a choice vineyard that God planted in the promised land. He tended it with special care. Of course God expected a good harvest for His work, as any farmer would. Instead the Israelites produced unrighteousness and injustice.

The vine imagery appears in other Old Testament passages as well (see Psalm 80:8–16; Isaiah 27:2, 3; Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10, 11; and Ezekiel 15). Here in John 15 Jesus now applies Old Testament imagery in a new way: the *true vine*, which will yield a faithful harvest, is Christ himself.

Since the Jews had not produced righteousness, God sent the "true vine" (v. 1) to accomplish His work. Jesus was going to show the world for Him what the nation had failed to show. Jesus replaces Judaism as the means by which people are connected to God, the keeper (*husbandman*) of the vineyard.

2. What does it mean that God takes away unfruitful branches (v. 2)?

The imagery in this verse outlines God's work as the keeper of the vineyard. Jesus is the vine, and He now pictures the disciples as branches. God takes special interest in the branches. Those that do not produce he "taketh away" (v. 2).

When a *branch* withers or fails to produce *fruit*, it must be cut off from the vine to protect the overall health of the plant. In a similar way the disciples are forewarned that God expects them to be faithful; if they are not, they may lose their privileged position. Compare John the Baptist's dire warning in Matthew 3:10: "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

Those already bearing fruit, however, are pruned so that they will bear even more. It is clear that God works with His own in ways that make them more pleasing to Himself, as we will see in verse 8.

3. What does God do to give His children further opportunity for spiritual growth (vs. 3,4)?

When Jesus said to His disciples, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you," He was adding to the thought of pruning. He indicated that they had already been cleansed by the pruning process. "Pruning" refers to cutting a plant back in order to give the opportunity for new and fresh growth. The process God uses in pruning His children is at times very painful. It is through suffering and pain that we often grow the most and become more godly and productive.

The disciples had been through a lot with Jesus and had learned a great deal by listening to Him. If they wanted to continue to be spiritually fruitful, they needed to continue to be godly and obedient to His instruction. To abide in Him refers to a constant and continuous effort to be in right relationship with Him. God does not want a person to be godly one day and sinful the next. The Christian life must be consistent if the believer is going to be fruitful. This is not a passive, do-nothing attitude but an active and diligent walk with Jesus.

Jesus then went back to His analogy of the vine (v. 4). On a grapevine, or any other greenery, a branch cannot bear fruit if it does not stay anchored in the vine or trunk. This is just as true of an apple tree, for example. If a branch becomes severed from the trunk in any way, it will no longer produce apples. Nor can a Christian be righteous without staying connected to Jesus Christ. Each one of us must live in the light of our understanding of what He expects of us as His children. In that way we will live godly, fruitful lives.

4. In what ways have you noticed God "pruning" your life? What have you learned from this experience?

God seems to have various methods for pruning those who seek Him, doesn't He? We see some of those ways in the pages of Scripture (examples: Luke 18:28; 19:1-10). Some refused to be pruned, with sobering consequences (examples: Luke 18:18-23; 2 Timothy 4:10a).

Rather than wait for God's (possibly) severe pruning, perhaps some self-pruning is in order. "Don't confuse activity with accomplishment" is an old cliché, but it has a ring of truth. Some folks take on too many jobs at church, and their flurry of activity leaves them physically, mentally, and spiritually exhausted. A good start may be to consult with someone who knows you well and will give you frank answers. Ask, "What areas of my life do you think I need to prune back?" Then brace yourself—don't get defensive at an honest reply!

5. What is necessary if a Christian is going to produce spiritual fruit for the Lord (v. 5)?

Jesus now reiterates the importance of our spiritual lifeline. If we lose that connection, then we lose our power to serve. And once we lose the power to serve and bear fruit, we are in great danger. The danger is not just in being pruned back a little but in being pruned away permanently (Luke 13:6–9). Jesus emphasizes this point here in verse 5 so that there can be no misunderstanding: “without me ye can do nothing.” Jesus’ teaching on remaining faithful would become critical during the persecution that the first-century disciples were to face.

6. What does it mean for God to take the unfruitful branches and cast them into the fire (v. 6)?

Verse 6 has been interpreted in a number of ways. Since the context is about branches in the vine, it seems to refer to those who do know the Lord. Perhaps the casting out speaks of a loss of fellowship, the withering of the loss of spiritual vitality that accompanies being in a right relationship with Christ, and the burning of the loss of reward at the time of judgment. Some think a better interpretation is to view this as referring to professing believers who are not truly saved and are judged accordingly.

7. How do we let Jesus' words abide in us (v. 7)?

The word *abide* implies intimate knowledge of what a person has said. But it also implies that the words become a vital part of the way a believer lives. So Jesus' words abide in us when we know what he said and did, and when we allow those words and actions to affect the way we live. By reading and memorizing we take in God's Word; by obeying we indicate that the words abide in us (Osborne, ed., *Life Application Bible Commentary*, Tyndale).

One of the most encouraging aspects of abiding in Christ is the reality of answered prayer. Often we hear complaints about God not really caring and not answering prayer, but such complaints perhaps indicate a lack of abiding on the part of the complainer. The person who abides in Christ knows the mind of Christ and as a result has a more effective prayer life. This leads to a display of the working of God that results in Him receiving glory. As others see our walk with Him and witness answered prayer, God is honored.

8. What did Jesus say would be the result of bearing much fruit (v. 8)?

God receives glory when we “bear much fruit” in the sense that our actions reveal His power at work in the world. When we do the right thing, our witness to others shows that we recognize God to be worthy of our service and worship. Jesus’ entire earthly ministry has been focused on the glory of God (John 17:4). We show that we are His true followers when we attempt to do the same thing in our own lives.

9. How did Jesus explain that believers should love one another (vs. 9,10)?

Can we possibly comprehend the truth that the way God the Father loves His Son is the way Jesus loves us? The depth of that love is far beyond our understanding and ability to grasp. We are loved by Jesus in the same way Jesus is loved by God! In a few verses we will get a glimpse of how great that love is. The thought of such great love for us should cause a response of deep love for our Saviour. We should be totally dedicated and committed to loving and serving Him.

If we fully comprehended the love of which we speak, we would indeed abide in that love. At this point Jesus explained succinctly exactly what that abiding entails: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (v. 10). The emphasis is on obedience to Jesus' commands. There is no mystical secret to abiding in the love of Jesus; it is simply a matter of listening to Him, learning what He wants us to be and do.

What is the example Jesus gave? It is His own obedience to His Father. The very fact that He came to earth knowing it was for the purpose of dying for our sins gives evidence of His willing obedience. The price Jesus paid for our redemption, in obedience to His Father's will, should never cease to be an incentive for our obedience to Him.

Connected to One Another (John 15:12–17)

10. What is the greatest test of love, and what example do we have (vs. 12, 13)?

Jesus does not expect His followers to grudgingly and dutifully carry out His wishes while longing for life to end so that we can be delivered! He wants His children to have His joy within themselves, resulting in what He called a "full" joy (v. 11).

The joy Jesus wants His followers to have is a joy that fills their lives completely, to the point where it is ready to spill over. Why should we ever resent being told we must be obedient to Christ? Our obedience will result in a greater joy than anything else in life can give.

The real test is now given: not only are we to respond by loving Jesus, but we are also to love one another in the same way Jesus loves us. What a difference it would make in our churches if we fulfilled this command of Christ! If we loved and forgave as He loves and forgives, the petty bickerings that cause dissension and hurt feelings among believers would disappear. Jesus set the standard as high as it could go by saying that there is no greater love possible than that which is shown when a person gives his life for his friends (v. 13).

We sometimes hear of people giving their lives so that someone else can live. Is this our attitude toward fellow believers, or are we at times glad they are gone? Jesus is the greatest example of all, for He willingly laid down His life on the cross for every one of us.

11. How can we be both a slave and a friend of our Lord (vs. 14, 15)?

Technically, a servant (one who follows commands) is not a friend (an equal) to his or her master. We are friends of Christ in the sense that we are privileged to know His thinking.

One Old Testament personality was called a friend of God. "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (James 2:23).

The thing that showed Abraham to be a friend of God was God's sharing of intimate matters with him. Friends are those who reveal their hearts and innermost thoughts with one another. God has revealed His mind and desires to His children. While the thoughts expressed here were given first to His disciples, it is accurate to apply the same truths to ourselves. We have become His followers and desire to learn from Him just as His disciples did. The universal principles He was teaching them will also make us what God wants us to be.

12. Who initiated the relationship between the disciples and Jesus (vs. 16, 17)?

Although it was common for followers to choose which teacher they wanted to learn from, Jesus reminded His disciples that in His case He had done the choosing, personally calling each of them to follow Him. Later in his life the Apostle John wrote, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). We also have a relationship with God because He initiated it. In each case, however, the choosing was just the beginning. He wants fruit from us.

The disciples were chosen and appointed to spread the gospel, bearing fruit for God's kingdom. We have been chosen and placed as branches in the Vine, Jesus, with the expectation that there will be fruit for Him. In the process of bearing fruit that remains, we have the promise that we can ask for what we need and receive it. God will respond to the needs we present that are relative to getting His message out to those who do not know Him.

Jesus always remains central, for even our prayers should be presented to the Father in His name. Above all, we must remember His primary command: we who are His children should love each other, even sacrificially.

CONCLUSION

Our passage today emphasizes the principle need to be connected in our spiritual lives. If we follow Jesus' teaching, He treats us as "friends," and with Jesus, you really do have "a friend in high places"! With Him on our side, there is no limit to what we can do—provided that we stay connected.

How sad it is to see an unconnected Christian! Ironically, it seems sometimes that it is preachers who are in the most danger of losing their connection to the true vine. Preachers are under tremendous pressure to be involved in all the major and minor activities of the church. They scurry from one meeting to another, trying to keep all the programs going. Under all this time pressure, it's tempting for them to start cutting back on their prayer and devotional life.

The cure for the Christian who is relying on his or her own strength to get things done is Zechariah 4:6: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

PRAYER

Lord, we know that You have called us to love one another the way that You loved us. But sometimes our pride and feelings get in the way, and we don't treat each other the way that we know we should. Help us to see the importance of unity in Your church. Help us to bear fruit by staying closely connected to You and to one another. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

When we bear fruit and love one another we show that we understand Jesus.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The next lesson deals with "The Light of Love." Prepare yourself for the first lesson of a new quarter by reading 1 John 2:7-17.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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